

A Tale of Two Communities Pakistani Textbook Representations of 1857

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Abstract

This paper is a snapshot of how the events of 1857 are reconstructed to craft Pakistan's national imagination by state, non-state, private and British textbook historians. The textbooks written for children of government schools tend to reflect the greatest degree of communal and religious interpretations of 1857. The books produced by non-government and private institutions employ a somewhat lesser communal tone and offer a greater level of sophistication in terms of the cultural, economic, social, political and material dynamics of the rebellion. The British version of 1857 barely conceals the imperial impulse in its language and vocabulary.

Knowledge of the past and national identity

In Pakistan there seems to be a general amnesia surrounding the events of 1857. There are mainly two reasons for this national forgetfulness. The immediate one seems to be that the year 2007 has been a turbulent one for Pakistan and the country is in the grip of political turmoil and on the verge of major impending changes. The second reason, a deeper and more serious one, is that the study of history has diminished both as a pastime and as a school subject. Since history is not considered a lucrative subject in the job market, its serious study has declined sharply over the last few decades. Several departments have been closed down and few students are attracted to a formal study of the past. This is partly a function of the dull, boring and uninspiring manner in which it is taught and partly the result of lack of encouragement and support from educational authorities.¹

¹ Mubarak Ali, 'Development of the Discipline of History in Pakistan' in Inayatullah, Rubina Saigol & Pervez Tahir (eds.), *Social Sciences in Pakistan: A Profile* (Islamabad: Council of Social Sciences, 2005), pp.237-54.

In the comprehensive educational policy of 1959, it was recommended by American experts that history, geography and civics should be grouped together into one subject called 'Social Studies'.² History was reduced to one third its previous volume, as a study of the past was considered unnecessary for a new state that looked forward to a modern and scientific future. The loss of status as an independent discipline worthy of serious study led to a steady decline in its importance except as the basis of constructing national memory along predetermined lines. History, as a field of knowledge, was placed squarely and exclusively in the service of creating, elaborating and disseminating the national narrative within the confines of officially sanctioned and state-sponsored nationalism.³ Up to the middle level (Classes 6 to 8) it was subsumed within Social Studies where it occupied a less privileged space. From Class 9 upwards it was made a part of Pakistan Studies, an area of study introduced during the time of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In Pakistan Studies again the function of the history part was exclusively the construction of national identity formation.

The formation, re-formation and consolidation of national identity required that the past be re-written within the parameters of the two-nation theory.⁴ A state that was formed within a communal split which became its ideological basis was unable to emerge from its foundational mythologies. The foundational myths of Pakistan centre around the absolute, complete and total difference between two communities—Hindus and Muslims—who never shared anything in common, were always and forever enemies and could never in the future become one nation or community. Pakistan's national tale is therefore a tale of two communities – two eternally irreconcilable and essentially inimical religious communities.⁵

² *Report of the Commission on National Education*, 1959. Government of Pakistan. Institute of Educational Research, University of the Punjab.

³ Rubina Saigol, *Knowledge and Identity: Articulation of Gender in Educational Discourse in Pakistan* (Lahore: ASR, 1995).

⁴ Rubina Saigol, 'The Boundaries of Consciousness: Interface Between the Curriculum, Gender and Nationalism', in Khan, N.S., Saigol, R. & Afiya S. Zia. (eds.), *Locating the Self: Reflections on Women and Multiple Identities* (Lahore: ASR, 1994).

⁵ The two nation theory has been the underlying principle of history writing more urgently since the fall of Dhaka in 1971 which punctured the two nation idea at its core. The need to reassert it became imperative for the reinforcement of a denuded state ideology. In 1975, a teacher's guide for Social Studies for Class 4 has the following instructions: 'Teach the children the history of the Punjab in such a way that the following facts

The past came to be reconstructed, re-written, revised and retold according to this overriding national objective in the hope that a country composed of several different linguistic communities, nations and peoples could somehow be homogenized purely on the basis of religion. Religious identity acquired an urgency not seen before as ethnic, religious and linguistic identities constantly interrupted and punctured the monotonous tale of the monolithic nation. The greater the assertion of ethnic and other multiple identities residing in the land, the greater the force with which the tale of the two nations was repeated, reiterated, reinforced and recounted. The more tentative and fragile the definition of the nation the more vociferously was it stamped upon the minds and hearts of the people through endless enactments of the nation's rituals in schools and in public places.

Since the past was being reorganized based on the imperatives of the present, events and people, incidents and facts were all selected on the basis of the extent to which they could fit within the accepted national story.⁶ Whatever was contrary or contradictory, uncomfortable or discordant was selected out in the careful crafting of the nation's story. Facts and incidents, records and memories that might interrupt the smooth national tale and show ruptures in it were silenced, ignored or denied. Many facts and incidents were completely left out while others were reinterpreted to suit the exigencies of the state and the governments of the time. Thus emerged a cleansed and sanitized tale of heroic but victimized and suffering Muslims, faced with a perpetual threat from the cunning and deceitful Hindus. In the end, however, the brave and valiant Muslims carved out a separate homeland for themselves where they could live in peace and harmony. In virtually every state approved textbook the story is told as a slow coming into being of the self, of the homeland and of the fulfillment of some destiny. Irrespective of how far back some event occurred it was a part of a chain of events that

become absolutely clear: 1) the complete difference between the way of life, customs and traditions, beliefs and culture of the Hindus and Muslims, 2) Give special emphasis to those aspects which forced the Muslims to create a separate country for themselves; here especially emphasize the economic, educational and social exploitation of the Muslims at the hands of the Hindus; the favourable and friendly attitude of the British towards Hindus as compared to Muslims; the unequal and discriminatory attitude of the Hindus towards the Muslims.' p.11.

⁶ Krishna Kumar, *Prejudice and Pride: School Histories of the Freedom Struggle in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: 2001). Viking, in this book Kumar argues that the past is reconstructed based on the imperatives of the present.

culminated in the formation of Pakistan. The national narrative is almost written from back to front – the emergence of Pakistan is a given and the rest is just a flashback of how this predetermined reality was born out of enormous struggles, bloodshed and martyrdom of the Muslims of yesteryear.

The events of 1857 sit uncomfortably on this ideological landscape. They do not fit exactly into the neatly woven tale of the two communities. The latter story requires essential and permanent enmity between Hindus and Muslims, but the events of 1857 contain forbidden whispers of joint struggles and collective actions. Even more prohibitively the stories of 1857 evoke images of brave Hindus and of women fighting battles. Neither of these two images – valiant and defiant Hindus and women fighting battles on horseback – fit the national imaginary which relies so deeply on the valiant and brave *male* Muslim to construct the story of a masculine and virile nation. In most of the Social Studies and Pakistan Studies discourse, the Hindus are depicted as essentially feminine – weak, timid and womanly.⁷ There is, therefore, no language with which to speak of Mangal Panday⁸ or Nana Saheb⁹ or the

⁷ Saigol, Rubina. *Knowledge and Identity*. In this book I looked at the way in which the Social Studies discourse is gendered and constructs a gendered nationalism in the form of the two nations binary in which Hindus are feminized and the Muslims are masculinized. This is a shifting discourse in which the positions change when the narrative shifts to a moral plane and the Muslims become feminized and the Hindus are rendered hypermasculine.

⁸ Mangal Pandey, a resident of Ballia, in Uttar Pradesh, was a soldier in the army of the British East India Company. At the time of the First War of Independence, the company introduced new rifles, which used animal fat for greasing the cartridges. Influenced by the example of his compatriots in Berhampur, Mangal Pandey refused to use the greased cartridges and broke into open mutiny on 29, March 1857, at Barrackpore near Calcutta and urged his comrades to join him. Surrounded by guards and European officers, he tried to commit suicide by shooting himself and was seriously wounded. He was court-martialled on 6 April and hanged at Barrackpore on 8 April 1857.

⁹ A Maratha, one of the leaders of the First War of Independence, Nana Saheb was born in 1824 to Narayan Bhatt and Ganga Bai. In 1827 his parents went to the court of the last Peshwa Baji Rao, who adopted Nana Saheb, thus making him heir-presumptive to the throne. On the death of the last Peshwa, Baji Rao-II, in 1851 the Company's government stopped the annual pension and the title. Nana Saheb's appeal to the Court of Directors was not accepted. This made him hostile towards the British rulers. When the First War of Independence broke out, he assumed leadership of the

hundreds of other Hindus who participated in the resistance or lost their lives. Similarly, the honour of a proud Muslim nation requires its women to be demure, shy, retiring, domestic and tamed – the opposite of the masculine man. So then how does one speak of Hazrat Mahal¹⁰ or Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi¹¹ (the latter creates the double discomfort of not only

mutineers in Kanpur. After seizing Kanpur, which had a small British garrison, Nana Saheb proclaimed himself the Peshwa and called for the total extermination of the British power in India. Kanpur was recaptured by the British under General Havelock and the last serious engagement (16 July 1857) resulted in a total rout of Nana's forces. Nana rode away to an unknown destination in Nepal in 1859 and probably perished in the jungle.

- ¹⁰ Begum Hazrat Mahal, also known as Begum of Awadh, was the wife of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. Begum Hazrat Mahal was endowed with great physical charm and grace as well as organizational skills. After, her husband was exiled to Calcutta, she took charge of the affairs of the state of Awadh, which then comprised a large part of the current state of Uttar Pradesh, India. During India's first war of independence (1857-58), she led a band of her supporters against the British, and was even able to seize the control of Lucknow. She declared her son Birjis Qadr as the king of Awadh. She is believed to have worked in close association with other leaders of the India's First War of Independence, including Nana Saheb. When the forces under the command of the British re-captured Lucknow and most part of the Awadh, she was forced to retreat. She turned down all offers of amnesty and allowances by the British rulers. Ultimately, she had to retreat to Nepal, where she was offered asylum by the Rana prime minister Jung Bahadur. She died there in 1879 and was buried in a nameless grave on the grounds of Kathmandu's Jama Masjid.

- ¹¹ Lakshmbai, the Rani of Jhansi, queen of the Maratha, ruled princely state of Jhansi in North India, was one of the leading figures of the Indian rebellion of 1857, and a symbol of resistance to British rule in India. At that time, Lord Dalhousie was the Governor General of British India. Though little Damodar Rao, adopted son of late Maharaja Gangadhar Rao and Rani Lakshmi Bai, was Maharaja's heir and successor under Hindu tradition, the British rulers rejected Rani's claim that Damodar Rao was their legal heir. Lord Dalhousie decided to annex the state of Jhansi under the Doctrine of Lapse. The Rani appealed her case in London but lost and was punished in various ways. But Rani Lakshmi Bai was determined to defend Jhansi. She proclaimed her decision with the famous words :*Mi mahji Jhansi nahi dehnar* (I will not give up my Jhansi). Jhansi became a center of the rebellion upon the outbreak of violence in 1857. Rani Lakshmi Bai started strengthening the defense of Jhansi and assembled a volunteer army. Women were recruited as well as men and given military training. Many from the local population volunteered for service in the army ranks, with the popular support for her cause on the rise. In September and October of

being a woman and fearless but also a Hindu and still brave!) Hazrat Mahal and Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi are grave interruptions in the masculine tale of war, battles, fighting, blood, martyrdom, death, defiance and resistance. They are intruders who must either be written out to allow appropriate national forgetting or re-written to become masculine.

The meager history portions of Social Studies and Pakistan Studies books use various devices to accomplish a mainly masculine Muslim and pure tale of the coming into being of the pure land. The events of 1857 are communalized and masculinized. One of the well known devices that enable a writer to accomplish the act of forgetting is compression. In a number of textbooks the account of 1857 is covered in no more than two or three pages. The less said the better. Another device that is very helpful is the selective use of ‘facts’. At the author’s convenience certain facts are left out and others chosen to create a specific picture of the resistance. A device that is sometimes used to cover up embarrassing facts is to splurge on a false story – one can lie by not telling or by telling a different story. The latter device is frequently used when textbook writers put their uncomfortable pen to the events of 1971 and the formation of Bangladesh.¹²

Different textbook writers use the various devices and specific vocabularies to conjure up a variety of stories of 1857. A small sample has been selected for this paper as examples of the construction and re-construction of 1857 in contemporary educational discourse. Apart from examples of State textbooks, privately produced books have also been selected to see if there is a significant difference in how the past is constructed and memories forged. It is not unreasonable to assume that there might be competing and contradictory tales given that the events of 1857 are shrouded in mystery for most Pakistanis. In the absence of a popular imagination ignited by films, media and other sources, textbook

1857, the Rani led the successful defense of Jhansi from the invading armies of the neighboring rajas of Datia and Orchha. In January of 1858, the British Army started its advance on Jhansi, and in March laid siege to the city. After two weeks of fighting the British captured the city, but the Rani escaped in the guise of a man, strapping her adopted son Damodar Rao closely on her back. She fled to Kalpi where she joined Tatya Tope. During the battle for Gwalior the Rani met her death on 17 June.

¹² Saigol, Rubina. ‘Enemies Within and Enemies Without: The Besieged Self in Pakistani Textbooks’. In *Futures: Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures*, 37:9 (November 2005), pp.1005-035. In this paper I have attempted to explain how the truth about Bangladesh is silenced by splurging on an alternative story that fits in with state nationalism.

accounts often become the sole transmitters of the tale. State textbooks in particular fill the gap left by the absence of any public conversation about 1857 because they are inexpensive and widely disseminated. However, in recent years the entry of private publishers in the textbook market may have changed the monotony of the ideological landscape. This was explored in this modest examination of texts used for children for the purpose of creating memories.

Victims and heroes: Muslims in the government textbooks

The textbooks used in government schools where children of the less privileged classes go, express the point of view of the state. We turn now to the stories of 1857 that the state tells or refrains from telling. The Social Studies textbook for Class 6 produced in 2004 alternates between representing 1857 as a conflict entirely between Muslims and the British, and suddenly interjecting the names and struggles of Hindu fighters.¹³ This produces interesting contradictions in the text as it weaves its way between notions of Muslims as victims and Muslims as heroes in the conflict. It begins the section entitled ‘The War of Independence 1857 A.D’ by recounting the atrocities committed by the British rulers who came into India as businessmen and uprooted the local rulers and captured their states and territories:

The British where the colonial rule was prevalent committed atrocities and exploited the people in these areas. The people were fed up with these policies of British and they developed hatred for the rulers and they did not like the illegal domination of British. It was but natural.¹⁴

Then it suddenly becomes a story of Muslims:

The Muslims now sped up their efforts to get rid of the British clutches and yolk. The battles of Plassey, Buxer and Mysore were the forerunners of the war of independence. The people had become too poor during the reign of the company. The British sent wealth to England, which they collected from India.¹⁵

It appears that only Muslims accelerated their efforts to get rid of the British and the role of other communities in the subcontinent becomes silenced. The references to the battles of Plassey and Mysore are designed to focus on the struggles of Muslim icons like Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula of Bengal and Tipu Sultan of Mysore so that the struggle

¹³ *Social Studies – Class 6*, Punjab Textbook Board, Edition 1 (Lahore: Darsi Kutab Khana, 2004).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.121.

against imperialism seems to be a uniquely Muslim enterprise. At this point in the text it seems that the textbook writer became aware of earlier Muslim imperialism and felt the need to justify it. He thus embarks on a comparison of British versus Muslim rule in India:

The British also took back lands, which were attached to the mosques and temples. The British government also confiscated the land of Jagirdars. The Muslim rulers respected their subjects and they were provided with all basic amenities of life.¹⁶

There follows a paragraph about the high percentage of revenue and impoverishment of the farmers and peasants, the lack of employment of Indians in government departments, Indians being considered less trustworthy than Europeans and the missionaries encouraging conversion to Christianity. After describing these sources of resentment the writer turns to the introduction of the Lee Enfield Rifle, greased cartridges and the cow and pig story that appears in virtually every textbook as the cause of the revolt. This textbook is one of the very few that provides some economic, social and political dynamics of the revolt. Several others simply use the cow and pig story as *the* cause of the rebellion. After the causes have been established, the story takes an interesting twist and the Hindus suddenly appear on the scene playing a central role in the conflict:

So they became rebellious and made a revolt on 29th of March 1857 when Mangal Panday fired at a British soldier.¹⁷

This is the only textbook that mentions the name of Mangal Panday out of scores of textbooks examined now and in the past. After depicting the events of 1857 as a mainly Muslim enterprise to the exclusion of the Hindus, the writer feels compelled to acknowledge the role of prominent Hindu resistance fighters thus rupturing his own text through the contradiction. The following short section is devoted entirely to Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi:

Rani of Jhansi also revolted. She raised an army of 30,000 freedom fighters. She continued fighting for some time. She had meager source to cope with the fight therefore she was killed during the battle. She fought ruthlessly in the battlefield.¹⁸

This is one of the rare times that the Rani of Jhansi is mentioned in any Pakistani textbook on the subject. She is occasionally dealt with in a one-liner or not mentioned at all. Interestingly, the current text under discussion leaves out any mention of Hazrat Mahal despite its proclivity

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.121-22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.122-23.

to write a primarily Muslim tale of heroism and victimhood. In following paragraphs the textual tension arising from the two communities jointly resisting the British breaks up into a communal story underlined by Muslim victimhood:

The British avenged on the inhabitants of India including Hindus and Muslims. The Mughal princes were also killed. There was huge massacre and dead bodies could be seen everywhere, the common man suffered a lot at the hands of the British.¹⁹

So many soldiers were put in the prisons and the British laid the entire onus on the shoulders of the Muslims.²⁰

After acknowledging that the British avenged themselves by making all the inhabitants of India pay ‘including Hindus and Muslims’ the next section is chiseled to the needs of the two nation paradigm the latter being dependent upon the Muslims as victims. The ‘entire onus on the shoulders of the Muslims’ is the tale that is reiterated with a monotonous consistency in each and every textbook so far examined. The rest of the short chapter sticks to 1857 as a Muslim story of suffering, victimization and finally triumph in the form of a separate homeland. This is accomplished by once again resorting to a comparison with the British to engender the idea of Muslim greatness:

The British ruled over India for 89 years...The Muslims ruled over India more than one thousand years. Their administration and management was excellent. The Muslims were gallant, noble and true and devoted to every cause....When Muslims were defeated in the war of Independence, the British mercilessly killed them, confiscated their lands, their services were also dispensed with and they destroyed the Muslims, they starved and poverty became their fate....The British changed the curriculum of the Madarasas and they had their full say in Education also and they could change the syllabi according to their minds. The teaching of Hadith and Fiqah was stopped all together. The British freely distributed the literature of Christianity. The British also confiscated lands which were attached with mosques and Madaras and the income dwindled which came through these institutions. The British encouraged the dissemination of Christianity.... The Muslims now became only servants whereas British became their Masters. The rate of revenue was also increased. They also revived the taxes and again levied them, which were exempted before...Stamp act was

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.123.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

again revived and now Muslims could not don their turban on their heads and they could not grow the beard...They also made fun of Muslim heritage and culture. The Muslims fell victim to their wrath and suffered legion of hardships.²¹

The Hindus have all but disappeared from the story. They have exited fairly unceremoniously without a trace of their suffering, losses, bravery, death, sacrifice or greatness. The Hindus have vanished for a reason. The story has to make the inevitable shift towards the freedom movement for the creation of Pakistan. The Hindus cannot enter the two nation story as fellow-travelers in the struggle for independence. They are now positioned as the 'other', those against whom a separate Muslim freedom has to be attained. The writer thus jumps on to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the two nation theory and his efforts for a Muslim renaissance in India which culminated in the formation of Pakistan. The establishment of Pakistan is a foregone conclusion so the story is told as a slow unfolding of the already existing grand plan. The resistance movement of 1857 becomes the starting point for a struggle that leads to the formation of Pakistan some ninety years later. The revolt of 1857, a poignant story of joint struggles, is split into two different narratives each with a separate trajectory.

The Social Studies Textbook for Class VIII (also Punjab Textbook Board) is an even more compressed account of the events of 1857. It also ties the revolt with the coming into being of Pakistan and the Hindus are converted into collaborators with the British. The section on 'War of Independence 1857' begins with a fairly universalist formulation that attributes it to the 'deep-rooted human love for liberty and self rule'.²² The human is immediately reduced to primarily Muslim in the following reconstruction of 1857:

Muslims had ruled the sub-continent for centuries and now hated to be ruled by an alien nation. Thus the incident of 1857 has to be viewed as a last ditch battle on the part of the Muslims and also other nations of the sub-continent, for the preservation of liberty.²³

The resistance of 1857 was a 'last ditch battle on the part of Muslims' and the 'also other nations of the sub-continent' are added as

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.123-24.

²² *Social Studies – Class 8*, Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore. Revised by National Review Committee, Federal Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan. Code No.XLV/AL, 2nd Edition. p.71.

²³ *Ibid.*

an afterthought. The writer then shifts abruptly to the results of the revolt which reflect the destruction of the Muslims:

At the end of the War of 1857 in which the British had come out successful, they wanted to destroy the last symbol of unity among Muslims. For this purpose, they attacked the Red Fort and caught King Bahadur Shah, hiding in Humayun's Tomb. Major Hudson killed Bahadur Shah's sons and presented their heads to him on a plate. General Nicholson ordered a general massacre of the native people and burning of their homes. Bahadur Shah Died in exile in Rangoon..... At the end of the war, the entire blame of uprising was put on the Muslims and Hindus assured the British of their loyalty and continued faithfulness. As a result of Hindu-British collusion, Muslims were subjected to great hardships. The doors of government service, trade and business were closed on them. They were forced to accept petty jobs as peasants, labourers, water-carriers, fillers of inkpots, and artisans, etc.²⁴

In this account the Muslims are constructed as the victims of the uprising. The contributions of the Hindu leaders of the movement are silenced and in their stead the tale of Hindu loyalty and faithfulness towards the British begins. The latter tale is an oft-repeated one in several textbook histories of the subcontinent. In the last part of the section there is a further conversion of Hindus who now join the British in committing atrocities against Muslims:

The Muslims did not rest after defeat in the War of Independence. They could not be cowed down by the atrocities committed on them by the British and the Hindus. Rather, they continued their struggle more vigorously, which culminated in the creation of Pakistan in August 1947.²⁵

In three sentences the textbook writer accomplishes a great feat. He manages to represent the Muslims as those who 'could not be cowed down' and did not rest but struggled more vigorously for their cause. Muslims are thus redeemed and the point is made that were not merely victims but also heroic and valiant. At the same time the Hindus are depicted as being in league with the British in committing atrocities upon Muslims. And finally, the creation of Pakistan is aligned with the struggle that began in 1857. The ninety-year jump is made with an ease that is as incredible as it is false. The Hindu-Muslim unity during the movement is denied and the role of Hindu leaders and fighters is erased

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.71-2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.73.

from the pages of history textbooks and the hearts and minds of unsuspecting children.

The textbooks in English reflect communal interpretations of 1857 but tend to be somewhat more circumspect because it is believed that the English reading audience would be more sophisticated. There are occasional grudging acknowledgments of Hindu rebels and fighters (as in the Class 6 textbook) and the vocabulary used for Hindus as less intense. Textbooks in Urdu border on the virulent in their representations of the 'other'. The Urdu reading public is generally considered more conservative and religious in Pakistan, although this may not necessarily be true in all cases. Nonetheless, the classes that read primarily in Urdu are believed to be more amenable to the state's nationalist project and its communal thrust. The Urdu Social Studies book, also for Class 8 provides the following interpretation of the revolt:

After the defeat of the War of Independence of 1857, the English took severe revenge against the Indians, in particular against Muslims. They unleashed their vengeance upon the Mujahideen. They declared Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal king a criminal and sent him into exile. Hence the Mughal empire ended...In spite of the fact that the Muslims and Hindus participated together in the War of Independence, the Hindus through their cunning and deceit, convinced the English that only Muslims were responsible. Most of the English authors also declared the Muslims as rebels. As a result the British government was bent upon weakening the Muslims to such an extent that they could not even think of becoming the rulers again and dare not make any further attempts to rule...despite destroying the Muslims politically, the English feared them and considered them a threat to their own rule. Therefore they left no stone unturned in destroying the Muslims politically, socially, educationally and economically. Until the end of the nineteenth century every step that the English rulers took resulted in the further degradation of the Muslims. The majority of the Muslims were thrown out of government service. Furthermore, government services were closed to them in the future also. Every time a new government post was advertised it would be stipulated that the position is not open to Muslims. Thus Muslims were kept out of the administration and government jobs went to other communities in particular to Hindus. The aim of the English rulers was to subjugate the Muslims to such an extent that they become incapable of ever seeing themselves as the rivals of the British...Apart from government jobs the

Muslims had been involved in agriculture for centuries. Most of them worked on the lands of feudal owners. The English confiscated all Muslim lands and gave them to the Hindus. As a result both the Muslim landowners and peasants were totally impoverished...The same treatment was meted out to the Auqaf and welfare institutions of the Muslims. Auqaf income, which used be used for the education of Muslims, began to be used for bad purposes with the blessings of the rulers. Several Islamic madrassas were closed down. The English plundered the cultural centres of the Muslims also. They sent rare books from Muslim libraries to England and thus, through clever scheming, caused irreparable damage to Muslim education and educational institutions.²⁶

The victim posture of the Muslims remains strong in this account and the British unleash their vengeance not only upon the Muslims but upon the *mujahideen* (holy warriors). The connection with *Jehad* (holy war) through the use of this vocabulary is designed to give religious connotations to a struggle that was waged for economic, social and political reasons. This device enables the writer to cut off the Hindus from the struggle right from the beginning. The vocabulary used for them is further evidence of the intentional communal reading of the event, for example, the Hindus are referred to as *aeyaar* (cunning, deceitful). Interestingly, despite trying to give it the colour of a holy war, the textbook writer admits that both the communities fought the war, but only to show that the Hindus were cunning enough to project it merely as a Muslim uprising. In a shifting discourse, when the textbook writers eulogize the Muslims for their bravery, valour and greatness they write out the Hindu resistance fighters completely. There is no mention of a single one of the Hindu leaders of the revolt. However, when the discourse shifts from heroics to victimhood there is emphasis on the fact that the two communities fought together and both were responsible but only the Muslims were blamed for it. Most writers keep shifting between the lens of heroism and victimhood, moving quite fluidly between the two, and often not dealing with the contradictions within the same chapter.

Hindu-Muslim differences are elaborated upon at the end of the chapter in line with the imperatives of the two nation story leading up to the creation of Pakistan. In the context of writing about the change in

²⁶ *Muashrati Uloom* (Social Studies), Class 8. No. XLV/AL, First Edition. Impression 31. Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore. Approved by Federal Ministry of Education, Islamabad. pp.90-1.

official language from Persian to English in 1837, a change that disempowered the Muslims who were well versed in Persian, the textbook writer bemoans the loss of Muslim power thus:

This measure made no difference to the Hindus for whom it was merely a replacement of one foreign language with another. They espoused the English language without any hesitation. However, the Muslims were unwilling to accept the English language. They saw the change of official language as a deliberate attempt to destroy their culture and religion. Hence they refrained from getting an English education. As a result they became educationally backward. On the other hand the Hindus learned the English language and established their educational superiority. Consequently, the fields of law, medicine and engineering opened out to them. The Hindus ended up becoming leaders in all the fields...During Muslim rule Islamic law was enforced. This was now being replaced by British law. Gradually Islamic law ended and was replaced by the Indian Penal Code. As a result the hundreds of Qazis who were well versed in Islamic jurisprudence were dismissed and replaced by Hindus...In the aftermath of the War of Independence of 1857 the social, economic and educational conditions of the Muslims were pathetic and they were in despair. The community was suffering from a steady decline...²⁷

The gradual rise of the Hindus is perceived as the concomitant fall of the Muslims. The chapter ends with Sir Syed's calls for awakening of the Muslims and the ultimate formation of a separate homeland. This textbook contains the most strongly communal version of 1857 and there is not even a passing mention of the role of women in the resistance movement of 1857.

The higher one goes in terms of the level of education, one is left incredulous at the extent of compression, elision, selective use of 'facts' and communalization of an important historical event like 1857. As one goes up to the higher levels, there is a steady elimination of the facts, incidents, records and stories that are not compatible with official, state nationalism. The Pakistan Studies textbook for Classes 9 and 10 (also produced by the Punjab Textbook Board) is amazing in the level of compression, denial, erasure and elision while dealing with 1857. The war of independence is a small section in the chapter on 'Establishment

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.91-2.

of Pakistan'.²⁸ It is therefore seen as an integral component of the struggles that led to the formation of Pakistan. Below is what the writer of this textbook says in a nutshell:

The war of independence 1857 was an attempt for the restoration of Muslims' political power and fortitude. A large number of Ulema formed a separate force under the leadership of Maulana Mohammad Qasim nanotavi...Later on, most of these Ulemas played an active role in the Deoband movement. Unfortunately the British won the war and put an end to the Muslim rule.²⁹

This entire reading is a yawning gap, a huge shroud of silence – no sepoys, no mutiny, no fighters, death, valour and of course no women or Hindus. It focuses entirely on the ulema whom almost no other textbook even mentions. Here the tale of 1857 is told as a singular tale of religious leaders fighting for Muslims. Death, sacrifice, martyrdom, resistance and collective struggles for freedom all vanish with one sleight of hand. The *ulema* struggled for Muslims' political power and fortitude! This is a prime example of lies told by not telling and by telling another story – a tall tale of imaginary heroes waging imagined wars. As the chapter is about the establishment of Pakistan it cannot be tainted by memories of collective struggles and joint resistance. We must not remember, at the risk of loss of identity, that we once stood side by side with Hindus in a struggle in which everyone sacrificed. We must engage in a ritual of collective purging with a will to never let a shred of memory break through the iron walls of forgetfulness.

As our children grow older manipulated and motivated forgetting must be engineered so that their minds are permanently engraved with separateness, division and distance. They have to be readied for a nation formed in rupture from a part of itself. It is imperative to forget the part of the Self lying just outside the boundaries of consciousness. In becoming citizens of tomorrow, the past must be dis-membered and not re-membered lest popular and folk memory break through the rigid walls of the garrison state. The present must dominate and control, ripping asunder a united past, dividing forever a common future. The children of Class 6 at least learned about some Hindus and women's role in 1857. The children of Class 8 learned less and those of Class 9 and 10 unlearned, and learned nothing.

²⁸ *Pakistan Studies – 9-10*, Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore: Code No. XLV/AL, Edition 2, approved by Ministry of Education, Curriculum Wing, Islamabad, 2002.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.15-6.

Resistance to colonization: perspectives in private and non-government texts

To break the monotony of the insipid tale told by the state to hapless children and captive audiences, a sample of textbooks produced by private publishers and one written from a British point of view were also explored. One does not find too many differences in the non-state textbooks with the outstanding exception of the account by the historian Mubarak Ali which will be discussed below. *A Concise History of Indo-Pakistan* by S.F. Mahmud published by the Oxford University Press is only marginally better than the government textbooks as it provides some political and economic causes of the rebellion and attempts to include both Hindus and Muslims and mentions (and mentions barely) the names of Hazrat Mahal and the Rani of Jhansi.³⁰ Nevertheless, the communal strain continues in spite of the use of a larger canvas for painting the picture of 1857.

Mahmud's account begins with the annexation of Oudh in 1856 and the removal of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah who was imprisoned in Calcutta. In this book we find one of the rare accounts of the doctrine of lapse according to which if a ruler died without an heir the state would be annexed by the British. Under this doctrine the states of Sitara, Jhansi and Nagpur were annexed. However, the account quickly takes a turn towards a communal representation:

The Muslims were the most affected, in that they felt that they had been badly treated. It is true that originally the English had been somewhat afraid of them. They had therefore treated them with undue severity. The annexation of Sind, and especially of Oudh, the utterly humiliating position of the last Emperor, Bahadur Shah, who lived on a small pension in an overpopulated Red Fort, supervised in every activity by a Resident who lived over the gateway of the Fort, rankled in the minds of the Muslims. The Hindus were incensed by the Doctrine of Lapse and what they called interference with their religious practices. The majority of people were unhappy and resentful in spite of the settled government, law and order, commerce and communications, schools and colleges, which the British had established.³¹

Although both Hindus and Muslims are presented here as being incensed by the policies of the Company, 'the Muslims were most

³⁰ S.F. Mahmud, *A Concise History of Indo-Pakistan* (6th Impression), (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

affected’ because ‘they felt that they had been badly treated’ and ‘originally the English had been somewhat afraid of them’. The Muslims are simultaneously victims because they are affected and badly treated but also heroes because the English were ‘somewhat afraid of them’ implying that they were somehow fearsome and posed a challenge to the Company’s rule. The Hindus were incensed by ‘what they called interference with their religious practices’. This sentence seems to imply that the interference with religious practices was a Hindu perception and, therefore, perhaps not a reality. In the following paragraph once again there is emphasis on how the Muslims were somehow more affected:

The people had been muttering for some time. The Muslims were especially frustrated. They even felt that they were denied high offices because the British thought them too independent in character. Hindu soldiers would not take the oath to go abroad if needed. They believed it was against their religion. Canning was suspected of being behind the new zeal of the missionaries.³²

The Muslims were especially frustrated ‘because the British thought them too independent in character’. This is a simultaneous construction of Muslims as being independent in character and by implication the Hindus were not so. However, the very next sentence indicates the independence of character of the Hindus: ‘Hindu soldiers would not take oath to go abroad if needed; they believed it was against their religion’. The contradictions between one line and the next slip through the writer’s pen without being addressed. These lines are followed by the oft-repeated story of the Lee Enfield Rifle and greased cartridges that triggered off the resistance movement. The mention of Nana Saheb who was not recognized as the Peshwa is followed by a short paragraph on the Rani of Jhansi:

Soldiers had also been sent to Jhansi under Sir Hugh Rose, where the Rani, clad in male armour, fought at the head of her troops. Jhansi was taken in April 1858, though the Rani and her brave commander Tantia Topi again escaped. The Rani went to Gwalior and fought another battle, in which she died fighting at the head of her troops.³³

This is an interesting depiction of the Rani of Jhansi who ‘clad in male armour fought at the head of her troops.’ Since the Rani was engaging in what are generally considered masculine pursuits of battle and fighting, she is masculinized – she is in male armour leading her troops from the front. In dealing with women warriors and queens

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p.224.

textbook writers never fail to mention that they wore male dress or male armour. The Queen Razia Sultana is often written about in a similar manner and textbook historians make a point of her appearing in court in male dress.³⁴ The idea seems to be that to fight the enemy on horseback are essentially masculine attributes and when women engage in such adventures they are essentially men – how could a woman be so brave, daring and fearless. This text contains one line on Hazrat Mahal, the wife of the Nawab of Oudh on the next page. Hazrat Mahal too, like the Rani of Jhansi, fought against the English and refused all kinds of favors in return for ending her resistance. However, both the Rani of Jhansi and Hazrat Mahal were in fact fighting, at least in part, for the right of their sons to ascend to the thrones left vacant by their fathers. This is something that all textbook representations overlook nonetheless this is one of the few textbooks that does mention both the women who participated in the resistance of 1857. However, there is no mention in most textbooks about the large number of women who were recruited by both the Rani of Jhansi and Hazrat Mahal as soldiers in their armies.

In spite of making references to the Hindu leaders of the freedom struggle, Mahmud ends up telling it as a tale of Muslim glory and suffering:

Since the Muslims had taken a leading role, and the Muslims as well as Hindus had proclaimed Bahadur Shah as emperor of India, the British were especially severe on the Muslims after it was all over. The result was that the Muslims shrank from them and refused to co-operate. They refused appointments, education and awards. The result was that the more co-operative Hindus made progress in education, in the higher services, commerce and later took part in political developments.³⁵

Despite talking about the Hindu leaders above the writer asserts that ‘the Muslims had taken a leading role’ and the ‘British were especially severe on the Muslims after it was all over’. The Muslims were quintessentially heroes and victims in the entire educational

³⁴ For example a Class 6 textbook for Social Studies (history and civics) produced in 1975 has the following to say about the thirteenth century Slave Dynasty ruler, Razia Sultana: ‘Razia was an able and brave woman...She excelled in horsemanship and in the art of war. On coming to the throne she gave up the veil and came to court in male dress...’.p. 32. When a Muslim woman ruler fought on horseback defending her dynasty she could cross gender boundaries to perform tasks considered masculine by textbook writers.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.225.

discourse. Since both – hero and victim – are prime signifiers in all kinds of nationalisms that feed on the ideas of suffering, loss, victimhood and glory, these two images recur as motifs in virtually every textbook. And typically in most forms of nationalism the ‘other’, the moral opposite of the self, represents values that are polar oppositions. The Hindus, the ‘other’ of the Muslim self are characterized as ‘cooperative’ with the British, the implication being that they colluded and as a result made progress and in education and higher services. There is a hint of betrayal in this discourse in that by espousing English education and services the Hindus had somehow betrayed the Muslims. This betrayal can then be used to argue why a separate homeland for the beleaguered Muslims was needed.

A Pakistan Studies book produced privately by St. Anthony’s High School for the GCE O Level examinations reflects a somewhat more sophisticated view of 1857 although it also contains hints of communal explanations in line with the official state view.³⁶ However, the tone of the writer is much more cautious and reticent with regard to religious issues and rabid communalism is absent. The account begins with the imperial policies of the Company, the doctrine of lapse and the subsidiary policy which rendered the local Indian rulers subservient to the Company and they could not engage in treaties and contracts without the permission of the East India Company.

Moving away from purely religious accounts of the revolt this book focuses on a number of political and economic causes underlying the resentment that led to the uprising. There is a discussion of the agrarian and land revenue policies of the Company, the permanent settlement of Bengal, the loss of income for artisans due to the proliferation of machine-made products, embargoes on Indian merchants, heavy taxation of local traders, lack of employment for Indians in services, conversions and forcible service overseas.

This textbook mentions Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and Hazrat Mahal albeit allocating one sentence to each:

Begum Hazrat Mahal, the wife of the ex-king of Oudh led the revolt. In Brailley, Khan Bahadur Khan fought against the British. Rani Laxmi Bai sacrificed her life in Jhansi at the altar of freedom in June 1858.³⁷

³⁶ Maqbool Rehmat, *Pakistan Studies (History and Culture)* for GCE O’Level and Higher Examinations (Revised and Updated), Saint Anthony’s College, Lahore, Maqbool Sons.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.21.

In these three lines there is recognition of the role of women in 1857 and, with the mention of the Rani of Jhansi, also of Hindus. However, there is no elaboration of their roles, the reasons for their rebellion and in particular the defiance exhibited by both these women. In spite of the fact that this textbook reflects a somewhat more balanced and less prejudiced approach, there is a tendency to fall into the mode of the Muslim as victim interpretation of the events. For example, there is an assertion that the lands of the Muslims were taken away and given to Hindu land revenue collectors under the permanent settlement of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa which brought economic misery for them and that Muslim landlords were deprived of their lands. These lines seem to indicate that the suffering was entirely for Muslims and the Hindus did not face economic hardship. The story of Muslims as the main victims is retold at the end of the chapter while discussing the results and aftermath of the revolt:

The War of Independence created a gulf between the Indians and the British. The Muslims were mistrusted because the British took them responsible for this mutiny. Many Muslim leaders were hanged in Delhi.... The Muslims were totally considered responsible for the War of Independence.³⁸

However, there is recognition that ‘Hindu-Muslim unity was shattered. They drifted away from each other.’³⁹ This acknowledgment of a prior unity belies the two nation construction of permanent enmity and everlasting hatred. However, like nearly every other textbook examined this one also affirms that the Sikhs in the Punjab and some other local rulers helped the British. The Sikhs appear as loyalists in the entire Social Studies discourse but few authors mention that they had been treated badly under Muslim rule and did not feel any sense of loyalty to Mughal rule. Without assigning historical reasons it appears that there was no basis for the absence of the Sikhs from the mutiny and they come to appear as ‘traitors’ or collaborators.

A history book written as supplementary material for children of middle levels by Mubarak Ali privileges the economic causes of the revolt while also recognizing the political, social and cultural reasons.⁴⁰ The most striking characteristic of this text is that the communal interpretation of history is absent and competing views of the events of 1857 are presented to enable children to understand how any event may be read in several different ways. The lively form of storytelling along

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27-8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁴⁰ Mubarak Ali, *British India* (Lahore: Fiction House, 2007).

with colorful pictures make this text much more readable than the dull and monotonous texts of most other books that seldom provide pictures to enhance the accessibility of the text. Even more interestingly this is not just a story of one revolt but of a series of revolts including some that preceded the one in 1857. This enables the author to show that resistance to colonial rule was ongoing and not a sudden one off matter. For example, there is mention of many revolts in Bengal and other places between 1764 and 1793 mainly as a result of the harsh revenue policies and the impoverishment of the peasant classes. Ironically, Warren Hastings the Governor General of the time called the rebels ‘terrorists’ and ‘plunderers/looters’. This kind of rhetoric echoes in contemporary times when the colonized are represented as ‘terrorists’ while the colonizers’ terror in accomplishing the conquest is overlooked and they are called ‘liberators’. There seems to be historical continuity in the colonial discourses of the past and those of the present.

The many interlinked causes of the revolt are summed up by Mubarak Ali as follows: the climate of uncertainty and unpredictability created by constant changes by the Company; the destruction of local handicrafts due to the industrial revolution; the ruin of weavers due to modern textile industry; the loss of the skills and independence of the weavers and their forcible entry into wage labour; the disempowerment of local traders and merchant classes with the Company monopolizing trade; the exploitation of peasants and mostly rural Indians due to a harsh and unjust revenue system; the encouragement of cash crops by the British which led to the rural folk becoming cash strapped and rendered them amenable to exploitation by local moneylenders.

Mubarak Ali explicates the caste and class character of the changes that provoked the religious feelings of the Indian communities. Mosques and temples were often razed to the ground to build roads in the name of development. Women were now expected to be treated in hospitals which violated the norms of *purdah* held sacred by some communities. The caste system was threatened with the introduction of the railway as members of different castes were forced to sit in the same carriages. Similarly, the introduction of modern hospitals led to members of different castes being in the same wards. The British emphasis on the abolition of *sati* and widow remarriage angered the Brahmins and girls’ schools were considered abhorrent by both Hindus and Muslims.

Ali argues that different classes of people were angry for different reasons. The jagirdars (landlords) were annoyed over the confiscation of their lands. The doctrine of lapse made the class of rajas and their heirs angry for fear that their states would be annexed. The sepoys in the army were angry as they were forced to shave their beards

and heads like the English army officers and this violated their religious sentiments. They were not allowed to wear tilaks, earrings or pagris and instead had to wear topis made of leather which also hurt their religious feelings. The story of the greased cartridges was a part of the series of changes that violated the sacred practices and beliefs of the different Indian communities. Additionally, there were severe famines and the classes which were already ruined due to the harsh revenue system and inflation were on the verge of destruction. The landowners and taluqdars were incensed over losing their former privileges and power. Mubarak Ali's account is the first class analysis that one comes across despite examining a wide spectrum of public and private books written for children.

The causes of the failure are attributed to lack of army discipline and experienced generals, very few arms and ammunition among the rebels, no means of communication with each other, loyalties of those who fought on the British side and became informers and finally the absence of any feelings of nationalism among the population. Additionally, the Indians were treated with contempt and disdain by supercilious British officers and the former had very little access to the services. Apart from all this the preaching of the missionaries that Christianity was the only true religion that could lead to salvation wounded the sentiments of the Indians. Ali also details the massive cruelty and vengeance wreaked upon the Indians at the end of the revolt. Many people were hanged on mere suspicion of being involved, sepoys were tied to cannons and blown apart, the Mughal princes were ruthlessly murdered and Delhi was ransacked with dwellings and dwellers both destroyed or forced to flee. The informers would charge two rupees to get their fellow countrymen arrested and murdered.

This is the only text that specifically mentions the effects on women. Quoting Zaheer Dehlavi's *Daastan-e-Ghadar*, Ali writes that the women took their children and jumped into wells to save their honour. The wells were full of the corpses of women and children. Women and men were driven out of the city, the men from the Kashmiri gate and the women from the Kabli gate. It was after these expulsions that the market of informers became extremely active and the English laid virtual siege to the city, plundering, murdering and looting where they could.

This is also the first text that mentions the tensions in the defining of the events of 1857. The Company straight away called it a mutiny and initially thought that the Meerut sepoy mutiny was an isolated incident. They attributed the entire episode to the resentment among the nawabs and rajas and landowning classes for the loss of their

former privileges. Some British historians called it a conspiracy hatched by Nana Saheb, the Rani of Jhansi and Hazrat Mahal and claimed that the common people were not angry with the Company and the majority of the Indians were happy under the English. Other historians attributed it to the loss of privileges by the Muslim ruling classes who incited the people against the Company. The Hindus, argued these historians, joined only later. However, Ali makes the important point that the Indian historians interpreted 1857 very differently and in 1900 Savarkar wrote a book called 'The First Indian War of Independence' in which the rebels were depicted as heroes and both Muslims and Hindus fought the war together. Right up until the end the Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar had been recognized by the Company as the legitimate ruler. The Company has usurped power through superior technology and deceit. Therefore, the principled position according to Mubarak Ali should be that he could not have been accused of being a traitor as he was the legal ruler.

However, historical interpretations, laments Ali, are seldom based on principles or values and are instead based on power. This text is the only one that clearly enunciates the idea of differing interpretations depending on who interprets and from which position is the interpretation done. This text allows children to imagine alternatives and creates a realization that history is not simply about raw 'facts' but an interpretation of selected facts reconstructed based on a particular framework of analysis which can be communal, imperialist, nationalist, Marxist, subaltern or other.

Mubarak Ali makes only a passing mention of the Rani of Jhansi. However, he allots more space to Hazrat Mahal and reproduces her reply to the Queen's proclamation of November 1, 1858 when India came under the Crown and the East India Company and its rule came to an end. Hazrat Mahal's incisive and shrewd response to the Queen's proclamation reveals that not only was she a courageous ruler and a dauntless fighter, she was also an astute statesperson. Below is the English translation of the letter:

This proclamation says that the Queen accepts and acknowledges the promises made by the Company. People should carefully see through this trickery. The Company captured all of India...The Company made the Rajah of Bharatpur its son and then took over his state. They took the Rajah of Lahore to London and never allowed him to return to India. On the one hand they hanged Nawab Shams-ud-Din Khan and on the other gave him salaams. They threw the Peshwa out of Poona and Sitara and imprisoned him for life in Bathore. They

imprisoned the Raja of Benaras in Agra. They totally annihilated the Rajas of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. They took away our ancient lands on the excuse that the army has to be paid salaries. In the treaty with us they promised in article 7 that they will demand no more. The matters that the company has arranged, if they are kept intact what will be the differences between the conditions before and now?⁴¹

Mubarak Ali thus recognizes the leading role played by women in 1857. His account is free of communal, nationalist and religious biases with a focus on the mainly material and economic dynamics of the revolt of 1857. The fact that this book is in Urdu augurs well for Pakistani children, the great majority of whom do not have access to books in Urdu that do not indoctrinate. By presenting 1857 as a part of a series of revolts against the Company's unjust and imperial policies, Mubarak Ali shows that this was not an isolated resistance but part of a longer struggle against imperialism. The emphasis on the class and caste character of the grievances against the English saves the story from a communal or religious turn and locates it in human struggles against all kinds of social differentiation and injustice.

The moaning of the hurricane: An English view of 1857

The last perspective to be examined in this paper is the British view represented in a book written by Teresa Crompton and used in some of the English medium schools in Pakistan.⁴² The subdued imperial undertones of this narrative echo throughout the text especially in the writers chosen to be quoted who are almost all either English or those with a loyalist perspective. Nevertheless, Crompton's account provides unique insights into the imperialist perspective as reflected in the perceptions of the English people. While explaining the causes of the revolt, she writes:

There were 45,000 British and 232000 Indian sepoy in the subcontinent. As a result the sepoy grew proud and thought that British victories were due entirely to their skill. They no longer feared the British.⁴³

It is interesting that Crompton accuses the sepoy of having grown proud when there are several accounts of the revolt that show that the Company officers expressed enormous pride and hubris and that one of the several causes was the supercilious attitude of the British and the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁴² Teresa Crompton, *History in Focus 3* (UK: Peak Publisher, 2004).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.42.

disdain with which they looked upon the people of India.⁴⁴ From Crompton's own account above, it is easy to surmise that British victories were in large part due to the Indian sepoys who were 232000 in number as compared to the English soldiers who numbered a mere 45000. To say that the Indian *sepoys* thought that British victories were due 'entirely to their skill' seems like a haughty statement as it is obvious that the British did owe their 'superior force' to the large Indian presence. The statement seems to imply that there was something inherently superior among the British that led to their victories. This statement falls in line with the white race superiority theory that underlies the 'civilizing mission' and the white man's burden. Crompton next contends that 'they no longer feared the British'. This statement seems to imply that the Indian soldiers should have feared the British and that somehow not fearing was wrong. There are hints of a 'racial superiority' argument here as well as the colonizing argument advanced by many orientalist scholars and missionaries that the English were morally and otherwise superior and therefore had the right to 'tame the wild native'.

In order to salvage British reputation for violating people's religious sensitivities, Crompton writes that although the British changed the cartridges greased with pig and cow fat, it was too late and the damage had been done. One of the reasons that she ascribes for the revolt using Syed Ahmad Khan's argument is that British laws and regulations were hard for the people to understand. This again appears to imply that there was nothing wrong with the new laws and regulations (the British laid claim to rationality and objectivity) but that the 'natives' just did not understand them. The Indians seem to be at fault in the explanations given although there is some reference in this text to the grievances of the Indians.

The text depicts the fear and foreboding felt among British officers just before the riots in Meerut broke out. On May 5, five days prior to the Meerut *sepoys* uprising, a British Company officer wrote:

I know that at the present moment an unusual agitation is pervading the ranks of the entire native army, but what it will exactly result in, I am afraid to say. I can hear the near approach

⁴⁴ For example, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan wrote about the treatment of Indians as inferior to the English and the haughty attitude of the Company officers in his *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*. In the latter work Sir Syed also mentioned the vain attitude that Christianity was the only true religion while Indian religions were false.

of the storm, I can hear the moaning of the hurricane, but I can't say how, when or where it will break forth.⁴⁵

The presentiment of something terrible in the air is vividly captured by Mrs. Coopland, the wife of an English officer who wrote:

I was struck by the conduct of our servants – they grew so impertinent. My ayah evidently looked on all my property as her share of the plunder. When I opened my dressing case, she would ask me questions about the ornaments, and inquire if the tops of the scent bottles were real silver; and she always watched where I put my things...my husband overheard the punkah coolies outside talking about us, and saying that these Feringhis (Europeans) would soon have a different home, and *they* would then be masters...⁴⁶

The officers had sensed the impending storm and feared it. Their read it in the changed demeanor of their ayahs and punkah coolies. Ironically, as Crompton acknowledges Mrs. Coopland was saved by a Muslim servant when the sepoys attacked. The imperial positioning and consciousness are clear in the above lines – the servants grew impertinent and the ‘ayah evidently looked on all my property as her share of the plunder’. This is ironic given that the plunder in India was carried out by the British and the land belonged to them. The servants’ awareness of this forbidden knowledge is defined as impertinence. The British were used to their servants being obsequious, timid, subservient, obedient and pliant. A change in their deportment foreshadowed trouble for the conquerors. In keeping with Syed Ahmad Khan’s view, Crompton writes a few negative lines about the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar who allegedly had lost all respect due to being eccentric and expressing interest only in music and calligraphy instead of concentrating on ruling the land. This is in sharp contrast to Mubarak Ali’s view of the emperor as a patron of the arts and culture and a good poet himself. Poets like Ghalib and Zauq recited poetry in his court. From an imperial perspective a monarch must be a warrior and an administrator – being a poet and a lover of arts does not tie in with imperial notions of ruling.

However, Crompton does recognize the fact that the ‘civilized’ British took savage revenge after the war was over and they had won (mainly due to help from the Gurkhas, Sikhs and some local rulers). She provides a frightening, yet poignant picture of the killing of sepoys by cannon fire as described by British Captain, Francis Maude:

⁴⁵ Quoted in Teresa Crompton, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

The first man led out was a fine-looking young *sepo*y, with good features and a bold, resolute expression. He begged that he might not be bound, but this could not be allowed and I had his wrists tied tightly, each to the upper part of the wheel of the gun...he never flinched for a moment. Then I...gave the word 'Fire!' There was a considerable recoil from the gun, and a thick cloud of smoke hung over us. As this cleared away, we saw two legs lying in front of the gun; but no other sign of what had, just before, been a human being and a brave man...the next man...writhed and wriggled violently, doing his utmost to escape from this terrible death.⁴⁷

The absence of women's contribution to the war is significant. There is no mention of Hazrat Mahal, Rani of Jhansi or the women whom they recruited in their armies. This silence may have many explanations but the immediate one that comes to mind is that this text is written from the point of view of the colonizer. It is not in the interest of the colonizer to tell the tales of the heroes of the resistance for the colonizers' called these heroes terrorists, miscreants, troublemakers, conspirators and plunderers. They called the resistance a mutiny. The lens through which they viewed the struggles of 1857 were different. For them Hazrat Mahal and the Rani of Jhansi were just conspirators against their rule; how could they be icons of resistance?

However, the greed and avarice that lie at the heart of all wars are pointed out vividly in the account by a British reporter whom Crompton quotes:

Lying amid the orange groves are dead and dying *sepoys*...a British soldier shot through the neck, gasping, and at every gasp bleeding to death! Here and there officers are running to and fro after their own men, persuading or threatening in vain. From the broken portals issue soldiers laden with loot or plunder. Shawls, rich tapestry, gold and silver brocade, caskets of jewels, arms, splendid dresses. The men are wild with fury and lust of gold – literally drunk with plunder.⁴⁸

Main findings of the study

From a study of the textbooks selected for this paper certain tentative conclusions may be drawn – tentative because this is a small sample and textual ideologies keep undergoing transformations over a period of time. What is presented here is a snapshot of how the events of 1857 are

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

captured and reconstructed to craft a national imagination that suits the imperatives of the present by state, non-state, private and British textbook historians. The main findings that emerge are recounted below.

The textbooks written for children of government schools, and approved by the Federal Education Ministry, tend to reflect the greatest degree of communal and religious interpretations of history and in particular of historical struggles. The state tells ruptured tales that obscure the fact that this was a war that both Hindus and Muslims fought together. This shared memory must be erased, the collective struggles must be forgotten lest other histories puncture the dominant myth of the two communities and relate the story of joint suffering, joint triumphs and joint defeats. The collective remembering does not suit the purpose of the tale of the two nations which mandates that the revolt be constructed as an early step toward the formation of a Muslim homeland. When the story is written as one of Muslim suffering, Muslim victimhood, Muslim martyrdom and ultimate Muslim triumph it cannot accommodate the 'others', especially the Hindus who must be catapulted out of national memory for the sake of our survival. As the story is almost always told as the beginning of the emergence of Pakistan the facts, ideas and incidents that do not fit within this framework are written out or transformed to suit the teleological tale of the nation.

With the two nation theory being the guiding principle of history writing and teaching in Pakistan, occasional grudging acknowledgement that 'Hindus also fought' is quickly removed from consciousness by asserting that after the end of the war only the Muslims were punished, while the Hindus cunningly convinced the English that they were loyal to them and Muslims meant trouble. This device reproduces the us/them division that underlies the two nation idea. Additionally, as a tale of Muslim masculinity and triumph it has to undermine the role of female heroines of the war who find an occasional and scattered one-line reference in some of the books. Furthermore, the absence of any alternative discourse, any cultural productions that could potentially shape popular consciousness on 1857 are absent, which leaves the floor open for government concoctions to proliferate social and cultural spaces.

Interestingly, the higher is the level of Social Studies and Pakistan Studies, the greater becomes the communal and religious tone of the authors. The Class 6 children are given more detail about the event and are told about non-Muslim freedom fighters but the Class 9 and 10 students are told nothing except that some ulema fought the war! The compression is greater at the higher levels as the history portion of Social and Pakistan Studies becomes diminished in relation to the other

portions. This compression also manifests itself in the fact that most government textbooks focus almost entirely on the ‘cow and pig’ story as the cause of the revolt to the exclusion of economic, social, political or historical causes. The immediate trigger of the event is presented as *the* cause of the rebellion thereby providing a superficial and a-historical understanding of the events.

The books produced by non-government and/or private institutions employ a somewhat lesser communal tone. They offer a greater level of sophistication in terms of the cultural, economic, social, political and material causes and results of the rebellion. Nonetheless, most of them follow, to a greater or lesser extent, the official state version of a divided memory – Muslims fighting a war of independence and Hindus collaborating with the British. The notable exception is the version offered by the critical historian Mubarak Ali who distances himself completely from communal interpretations and focuses squarely on a class and economic analysis of 1857. He also allots a generous amount of space to Hazrat Mahal though not so much to the Rani of Jhansi. The British version of the events barely conceals the imperial impulse in the language and vocabulary used for the soldiers. It seems to assume British superiority but also expresses their fear of the Indians whom they had looted and plundered but who, in their construction, had become the plunderers. This inversion of the truth is not discussed or analysed by the author. There are several points at which the various accounts converge or diverge on 1857 showing the rich complexity of the situation and its varied interpretations through time. The noteworthy fact is that the tale is different depending who is the speaker – the state, the private and/or the non-government sector.

A caveat needs to be added here. The fact that state or other institutions produce a particular version of the past does not mean that the official version is accepted as *the* truth. As any educationist knows, curriculum is subverted in pedagogy. Critical teaching methods may ensure that children are allowed to read against the text. Critical pedagogy in fact requires that children actively interrogate and challenge the text instead of viewing it as gospel truth. The teachers and learners inside a classroom can effectively overturn what is presented as the truth by the state, educational authorities or the authors of the texts.

However, this is much more possible in an environment where alternative possibilities are allowed space and questioning the teacher and the text are permitted. In more authoritarian environments the notion of one and only one truth that is to be regurgitated on examination papers is encouraged. Centralized examinations become a powerful source of control over what the children learn and believe, what they internalize

and what they are encouraged to forget for the sake of national survival. Most classrooms in Pakistan are not ones in which various versions of a story are negotiated to come to an independent and debated understanding of issues. The method of uncritical transmission of pre-packaged knowledge through standardized curricula ensures that education functions as an effective and powerful apparatus of state ideology.⁴⁹ In private schools, particularly the ones that cater to children of the well to do classes, other and competing versions of a story may be allowed to interrupt the official one. However, even in elite private schools the space for contestation of official ideologies is limited and resistance to given truth is not encouraged beyond a point.

The important point is that the entry of multiple texts in the market, and the consequent enlargement of choices, is a reflection of the fact that education, and in particular the curriculum, is a contested site of the struggles over meaning. Contradictions within and across texts and the multiplicity of social meanings create spaces for resistance to official truth designed to maintain the power of the rulers of the time.

Critical reflections

It is time now to try to make sense of the way in which the stories of 1857 are woven, abbreviated, elaborated, chiseled, shaped, molded, erased, imagined and told to our future generations. The first question that comes to mind is: why is the state telling this story in this particular way? The only way to answer this question is to examine the nature of the state, its foundational myths, its basic structure and its overwhelming imperatives.

First let's examine the foundational mythology of Pakistan. As already mentioned above, Pakistan's founding myth, the two nation theory, is the overarching as well as underlying principle that guides the structure of the history and Social Studies curricula. The more tenuous this theory the more urgent does it become to perpetually reiterate it. In fact after it was blown apart with the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 it was asserted even more strongly in textbooks as a way of solidifying an ideology that had been torn asunder by linguistic nationalism. The two

⁴⁹ In his famous work 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses', the French Structural Marxist Louis Althusser introduces the notions of ideological and repressive state apparatuses among which the former include schools, churches, legal systems etc. that construct and disseminate ruling class ideologies to legitimize the ruling groups' monopoly over power. See *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971).

nation idea, fictional as it is, is the need of the ruling elites of Pakistan in order to homogenize the nation on the basis of religion. The national integration and national cohesion project in Pakistan is at its historical low with three out of the four provinces disaffected with the centre dominated by Punjabi ruling elites and the Punjabi army and bureaucracy. Ethnic and sub-national movements in various parts of the country belie the myth of a single, monolithic nation united by the deep bonds of religion.

The ruling powers require the constant reiteration, re-membling and regurgitation of the two nation idea to underscore the fact that all Pakistanis are one nation based on Islam as opposed to the equally homogenized Hindus who constitute an other and opposite nation. In this kind of binary both groups are reduced merely to religious identity at the expense of all other identities some of which go much further back than religion. Forced homogenization by the ruling classes of Pakistan is necessary to undermine resistance movements based on ethnic or linguistic difference. It is also imperative for the sake of maintaining class power in the face of challenges by social movements of peasants and fisherfolk. Religion is relied upon by the ruling classes to weaken both ethnic nationalism and class consciousness, although the latter two also contradict each other.

The two nation construction requires the rulers to continually reassert that the Hindus and Muslims were 'always' divided, 'forever' enemies and 'never' had any unity nor could they ever fight together or be involved in joint struggles. The 'always', 'never' and 'forever' in the vocabulary used constitute the empty time of nationalism that Anderson talks about in his seminal work on the subject.⁵⁰ Any event or happening that interrupts the tale of the two nations, causes discomfort and has to be dealt with either through erasure, denial, deletion or reconstruction to fit the national narrative. 1857 is just such an event and if it has to be reconstructed as a story of a separate Muslim homeland coming into being, it must be remodeled and fashioned to suit this purpose. The

⁵⁰ In his seminal work on nationalism, Ben Anderson introduced the notion of the 'empty time of nationalism' arguing that nationalisms tend to refer to timelessness to establish the feeling that the nation always existed and will always exist (forever, always). This a-historical device is used to engrave upon the audience the eternity and permanence of an arrangement that is essentially historical and has a beginning and an end. Instead of history being a chronicle of real events it is stretched into eons which are emptied of actual events. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

memory of joint struggles by Hindus and Muslims must be adjusted so that the required fissures appear and twain come out looking like two eternal foes locked in a battle of epic proportions.

The need to craft tales, official folklore and collective legends also arises from the structure of the modern state and its manifestation in Pakistan. Pakistan is a heterogeneous society and within its borders live different religious, linguistic, ethnic and sectarian minorities. There is a wide variety of cultures, peoples, dresses, foods, music, dances, folk songs, tales, ways, customs, traditions and habits. The diversity of the land means that there are constant challenges to the centre and to the ruling classes not only from the dispossessed classes of peasants, workers and others but also from ethnic and sectarian minorities. The need to keep the polity cohesive and bound together in a unity, however false, makes it imperative to craft specific ideologies and disseminate them through the vast bureaucratic educational apparatus of the state.

Let us now take a look at the structure of Pakistan which in theory is federal but in reality Pakistan often behaves as a unitary and centrist state. The greater the push for provincial autonomy and recognition of diversity and sub-national rights, the greater is the state's tendency to centralize and accumulate power at the federal level. The federal principles of provincial autonomy and decentralization are not well developed in Pakistan. Religious nationalism becomes the overriding ideology that helps foster centralization and an authoritarian centrist structure of the state. It helps to undermine the claims of the sub-national, religious and other groups to rights. If the Balochis, Seraikis, Sindhis or Pashtoons demand certain rights, such as the rights to water and fairness in the National Finance Commission Award, religion can and usually is invoked to instill in them the fear of the enemies lurking on our borders ready to destroy us and our faith if we do not fall in line. It is hard to criticize religion which is forged as a weapon against anyone who disagrees with the government. The Hindus are especially very useful as 'enemies' in this discourse as they provide the constant threat that must be encountered jointly by all Muslims. These enemies can not only be used for national integration they can also be invoked to justify high defence expenditures to maintain a huge and hungry military. The two nation foundational myth, the *raison d'être* for Pakistan, has to be invoked at all times to remind us that we are in danger and that we must be united and support our ruling classes in their plunder, otherwise India and Hindus will annex us and put an end to our hard won independence. This myth provides support for the centralizing and authoritarian tendencies of the state.

Finally, it is important to explore how 1857 can be a metaphor for resistance against imperialism which has exhibited a remarkable consistency over time. While its aims and objectives remain the same, that is, conquest of the territory and resources of the world in order to ensure the supply of raw materials and markets for world capitalism, its dominant ideologies keep changing to provide new 'moral' justifications for the colonial enterprise. The new colonization of the 21st century is directed from its imperial centre in the US. Post-war re-colonization was primarily in the economic realm and was being carried out through the policies of the World Bank and IMF and later on WTO was created to push the neo-liberal agenda of de-regulation, privatization and liberalization to create a so-called 'free market economy'. This form of imperialism has now been given added impetus by direct military conquest of areas that can become raw-material producing countries for the energy-hungry US and its transatlantic allies. The US invades and conquers countries that are rich in resources such as oil and gas or are proximate to areas that are resource rich. In this project, the new justifying ideology, the new 'mask of conquest'⁵¹ is 'fighting extremism and terrorism'. In the older European form of colonization the justifying ideologies were 'civilizing the natives', later on the legitimizing ideology of conquest became 'spreading democracy and freedom in the world' and when this agenda failed miserably, the latest mask of conquest is 'fighting extremism and terrorism'. The imperial project remains continuous, only its masking ideologies keep changing.

The Pakistani state is both a colonizer and a colonized state. What is commonly called independence was in reality a transfer of power from foreign to local rulers and the post-colonial arrangements mirrored those in colonial times thus becoming a form of 'internal colonialism'.⁵² The ruling classes in Pakistan treated its constituent units as colonies, for example, using the jute produced in East Pakistan to earn foreign exchange which was used to develop West Pakistan. After the

⁵¹ This phrase has been taken from Gauri Viswanathan's seminal study on the way in which conquest and colonization mask real motives by providing some justification based on moral, aesthetic or civilizational superiority. See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

⁵² Ashis Nandy has introduced his notion of 'internal colonialism' in some of his writings. In his view, the end of colonization by the British did not mark the end of colonization itself as local elite groups began to act and rule in ways that reflected those of the former colonizers. See for example, *On the Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance* (New Delhi: Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1995).

formation of Bangladesh, similar policies were followed in relation to other provinces. Pakistan has a large standing colonial style army laced with the most modern weapons and a massive bureaucratic apparatus. Both of these institutions, borrowed from colonial style administration, serve the interests of the ruling elites and use their power against their own people to suppress sub-national uprisings. In the 1950s and 1970s there were resistance movements against the centre in Balochistan, in the 1980s the MRD movement was strong in Sindh and for the last few years there is intense fighting going on in the northwestern tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. There is also a resistance movement in Balochistan ever since the military decided to develop cantonments in the province and initiated development projects without involving the local population. The structure of the state and its response to insurgency are reminiscent of the colonial administration.

However, Pakistan is still also a colonized state as after the events of 9/11 the US administration forced Pakistan be an ally in the so-called 'war on terror' at the risk of being decimated. The killings in Waziristan are being carried out in the name of fighting the 'war on terror' which has cost the lives of several hundred tribesmen as well as hundreds of soldiers of the Pakistan army. The reaction to military interventions against Pakistan's own people is that there is a spate of suicide bombings directed mainly at the ISI, the main secret service of the military and the SSG, the Special Services Group, an elite force. The Pakistan army has been pitted against its own people in the name of fighting extremism and terrorism. Prior to 9/11 and the US attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq there was peace between the military and the tribal people and suicide attacks were unheard of in Pakistan.

The Pakistani government, though not the people, is a US ally and uses the same rhetoric of justification. In order to maintain its hold on power the Pakistani government uses the ideology of 'fighting terrorism and extremism' through 'enlightened moderation' although neither its means nor its rhetoric is either moderate or enlightened. As in 1857 in British India, anyone who resists the dominant construction of the world a la US is called a 'terrorist' or 'extremist' or 'miscreant'. Even though it may be the state that is colonizing and trampling upon the rights of people and provinces, and it may be the state that is acting in terrorist ways by killing and murdering its people with gunship helicopters, the moral discourse is inverted and the victims are turned into perpetrators. The state is absolved and valued as good and as a victim of terrorism, while those who resist imperial impositions not only of the US but also of the Pakistani ruling elite, are labeled terrorists to be hunted and killed in Bush style. Economic globalization and its

counterpart, the globalization of the 'war on terror', have ensured that the populations of countries like Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine and Sudan live under perpetual fear of State sponsored and State-directed terrorism.

The Pakistani state thus uses three main dominant ideologies to achieve the objectives of its own and global imperialism: 1) religious nationalism, which is mainly directed at its own ethnic minorities; 2) fighting extremism and terrorism, which is used to justify any and all actions of the government against democracy; and 3) enlightenment and moderation, which are designed to appeal to the imperial masters who fund the military government but are mere masks by a regime that has not exhibited either moderation or enlightenment in its actions. In 2007 the regime in Pakistan has resorted to every tactic under the sun to assail the constitution, destroy the judicial system and rip apart the very basis of democracy, enlightenment and justice. A popular movement led by lawyers and joined by intellectuals and members of so-called 'civil society' has managed to stem the tide of authoritarianism and the total destruction of democracy by an absolute dictator. But for how long? In Pakistan we need for 2007 to become another 1857 – but with one difference. The culmination of 1857 was India coming under the Crown. The culmination of 2007 should be Pakistan coming under representative rule – democracy.